

Chemical Suppliers and Pollution Prevention

Customer-supplier relationships are changing, creating close alliances for greater agility, quality, and innovation to meet global competition. These new relationships can benefit the environment as well. Companies are evolving toward providing services, rather than substances. An example is providing a swimming pool service, rather than selling pool chemicals. The result, a clean, sparkling pool, is the same. The greater the chemical use, the greater the profit for the pool chemical vendor. However, the fewer chemicals used by the pool service to achieve the clean pool, the greater the profit margin. Therefore, a company providing a pool service is likely to use less chemicals than a company that sells pool chemicals to achieve the same result.

This idea is useful in industry, with opportunities to contract for services.

To decide whether such an arrangement would be profitable, it is necessary to consider all the costs associated with chemical use. Most facilities know the chemical purchase prices, but are not aware of other associated costs, including procurement, external delivery, inventory, storage, internal delivery, use, monitoring, reporting, collection, waste handling, treatment, disposal, regulatory costs, training, equipment, information systems, and liability. Facilities are sometimes induced to purchase large quantities of chemicals to save money on unit chemical costs, only to spend even larger sums to dispose of chemicals that expired before use. When these costs and factors are considered, a services contract may be attractive.

Wise buyers ask more from suppliers than just a good product and timely delivery. Good relations with suppliers can cut costs and wastes and give added services to your company, including better material accounting, reduced waste and better process efficiency. The following are examples of questions that may be appropriate to ask of your suppliers:

Can you track chemicals and supplies, and provide an inventory and reorder system?

Do you deliver chemicals and supplies on time and in the quantities needed?

Are your containers reusable and can you ship your product with less packaging?

Can we reuse or extend the life of the product in-house?

Will you provide an expert to help us and ensure your product will do the job?

Will you provide testing to ensure your product meets our needs and is not contaminated?

Will you work with my company to improve the efficiency of chemical or material use?

Can you help me reduce the number of products used in my operation?

Will you help me in completing environmental, health, and safety regulatory paperwork?

Would you contract for share savings from reduction of waste and chemical use? For

instance, would you accept a set fee per month or per unit of production?

Can you provide ideas for continuous improvement and design of new products?

Can you train my employees to work with the chemicals, materials or equipment?

Must I report your product's chemicals to government agencies and will they classify wastes from your product as hazardous?

What is your environmental compliance record?

What efforts have you made toward environmentally friendly product design and life cycle analysis?

How do you assure communication and feedback?

Does your company have an environmental code of conduct or ISO certification?

May we return unused supplies?

Do you lease, rather than sell, chemicals and materials?